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CONVENTIONAL DETERRENCE IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF THE NEW CENTURY A STRATEGIC WORKSHOP

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Over the past half-century deterrence has been the bedrock of United States defense policy. As we move into the first quarter of the 21st century deterrence will remain fundamental to national security, however, a continually evolving multi-polar world may require different methodologies to achieve deterrence. Therefore a new set of dialogues on the nature of deterrence is required.

This Issue Paper summarizes the deliberations and issues raised during the Center for Strategic Leadership and the Department of National Security and Strategy at the United States Army War College hosted conference on Conventional Deterrence in the First Quarter of the New Century, A Strategic Workshop, conducted at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania from February 20 to February 22, 2001. Participants included senior officials from the State Department and Department of Defense including Ambassadors experienced in each region of the world discussed, distinguished subject matter experts from other agencies, academia and allied nations representatives.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Workshop was to answer broad questions of how U.S. national power should be postured to remain an effective deterrent force in support of U.S. national security objectives in the 21st Century. The participants considered the future challenges of an evolving geostrategic environment, U.S. national interests, alternative options and ways to employ the elements of national power (political-military-diplomatic-information-economic) and identified critical means (capabilities) needed for effective deterrence.

DEFINING CONVENTIONAL DETERRENCE

The workshop examined the role of conventional deterrence within a strategic planning framework. That framework calls for a systematic analysis calculating relationships among ends (objectives), ways (concepts) and means (resources). Conventional deterrence is a way not an end. Strategic conventional deterrence is distinguishable from strategic nuclear deterrence. The mere presence of nuclear capability in the proper circumstances deters. It is existential and uncontestable, "I have, and therefore I deter". In contrast, conventional deterrence is a non-existential relationship that is contestable.

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Conventional deterrence requires an integrated course of action utilizing all elements of national power: political, military, diplomatic, information, and economic. The objective is to dissuade an adversary from a current course of action or contemplated operations. Deterrence includes inducing behavior by reward, by denial, or by punitive sanction. Deterrence is premised on the ultimate ability to compel should deterrence fail. Conventional deterrence requires identifying a credible leverage over something a rational actor to be deterred values. Use of conventional deterrence requires a clearly communicated threat or reward, credibility, capability, and the processes and will to engage in a timely fashion. Conventional deterrence is a relationship between adversaries in which one or all may choose to be deterred.

THE WORKSHOP

The participants divided into two groups to examine future threats to the interests of the United States and the role of conventional deterrence using four disparate scenarios occurring in the year 2017. Considerations included the utility of conventional deterrence to deter a massive non-state insurgent/criminal entity threatening bioterrorism, a crisis between two developing states regarding access to oil reserves, a crisis stemming from competition between states for access to a limited water resource, and a high-end crisis involving two regional nuclear capable states.



Non-combatant Evacuation of US Citizens.

THEMES

The plenary session revealed a number of common themes in all four scenarios. Paramount, the United States must adequately protect its own people at home and abroad. Reflecting the contestable nature of conventional deterrence, opponents will seek to deter the United States and its allies from deterring them. The United States is vulnerable to adversary deterrence through mass casualty asymmetrical threat. Vital elements in deterring asymmetrical attack are crisis management to prevent attack and consequence management to mitigate the effects of an attack. Effective missile defenses (especially theater) were frequently mentioned topics during discussions in each of the scenarios. A nationally coordinated all-hazards defense was deemed prudent. Adequately protecting United States people is not synonymous with the concept of casualty aversion. The conference participants were generally skeptical that loss of lives would per se deter the United States. The American people will bear the burden and pay the price for preserving the United States and its vital interests. However, should the case for engagement not be made adequately, casualty aversion may adversely affect engagement in conventional deterrence.



US Troops on Patrol.

Pro-active coordinated global engagement utilizing the full spectrum of the elements of national power is deemed essential for exploiting conventional deterrence capabilities. Isolationism, trade barriers, and fortress mentality by the United States diminishes the utility of conventional deterrence.



Map of the Drug Trade.

The scenario dealing with the rise of a non-state insurgent criminal entity was most problematic. Many of the participants felt the current anti-drug policies of the United States are not significantly reducing the power accumulating in criminal entities resulting from access to the huge sums of money provided those trading in illegal drugs. It was felt that criminal entities tied to insurgencies would by 2017 create a threat to the vital interests of the United States unless eliminated. How to conventionally deter this type of non-state entity once it achieved significant strength proved problematic.

Conventional deterrence requires identifying something held of value and a willingness of the adversary to be deterred. Conference participants expressed concerns that this type of transnational criminal entity could deter the United States with the bioterrorism threat gamed in the scenario.

Globalization of the world economy is accelerating. Global enterprises operating in their self-interest significantly have now reduced the effectiveness of conventional deterrence through the use of economic sanctions. The expanding private sector role in the global economy will continue to diminish the effectiveness of government utilization of economic instruments of power.

By 2017, the United States will have developed substantial technological means to provide accurate objective information. Human intelligence (HUMINT) information resources are essential. Means to evaluate subjective intentions should be further developed. Fully sharing information throughout the interagency is essential. Credible timely information is also vital as part of conventional deterrent. Replacing assumptions with factual information is a conventional deterrent in defusing conflict between states.



Globalization Protesters.

Arms control and counter proliferation remain and will become even more important factors in marshalling world opinion to reduce conflict. In regions of the world where there is balance between competing regional powers it is essential to maintain that balance by deterring proliferation and arms races.



The Chemical Threat.

The United States must maintain its military capability and demonstrate it credibly. The military must be able to operate effectively in a contaminated environment. Whether the United States military is forward deployed or employs power projection, it is essential to conventional deterrence that the United States be dominant militarily on the ground, in the air, and at sea. Speedy response is essential. The United States military must have the capability to overcome anti-access and denial capabilities of adversaries. There can be no credible threat of military compulsion that is necessary for conventional deterrence without demonstration of capability. Interoperability between allied military tactical units is essential. Military to military contacts, overseas training and interoperability with allies are essential.

Participants opined that the present interagency cooperative process or lack thereof will be a key determining factor in the future success or failure of United States use of conventional deterrence. In particular closer operational cooperation at the regional level between the State Department and the Department of Defense (CINC) is deemed critical. Discussions focused on expanding the current crisis culture of the State Department to also include long-range strategic thinking and planning.

CONCLUSION

Conventional deterrence is an essential tool in “shaping” the world environment. All elements of national power are involved in conventional deterrence. Coordinated interagency processes should be enhanced. Cultural ways of thinking within agencies need to be changed to reflect the interagency processes and strategic perspective. Interagency operational processes should be formalized at the regional level. Conventional deterrence is effective only if the United States has the credibility, the will to act and the capability to compel actions through use of all its elements of national power. Credibility is achieved through continuous economic, military and political engagement. Ultimately the capability to compel compliance by the rapid, effective use of military power is essential to deter.



Troops Conduct an Air Assault.

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